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Story Circle Reviews
Books About Women's Lives
Money as Sacrament: Finding the Sacred in Money
by Adele Azar-Rucquoi

Money as Sacrament: Finding the Sacred in Money, by Adele Azar-Rucquoi

(Ten Speed Press, 2002. ISBN 1587611376).

Reviewed by Mary Ann Moore, Nanaimo BC, Canada

As a self-employed writer, I don't have a regular paycheck. It has taught me to be mindful about spending. I've also had to learn not to let that mindfulness become a sense of scarcity in my life. Most of all, I've learned to value my work in the world. Sometimes, when we're enjoying ourselves, we forget that we can still earn money while we're having fun.

Those were just some of the lessons I was dealing with as I read Adele Azar-Rucquoi's book. *Money as Sacrament*, 10 years in the making, is about making peace with money or, in my words, feeling at home with money. Adele wondered about the spirit in currency (dollar bills say "In God We Trust") and set out on a journey to meet other women and explore their stories in relation to money. She shares her own story, reflected by the stories of the 50 women she interviewed.

Adele's conversational writing style is rather like letters written to the reader. In each, we learn something about the appearance of the interview subject, what the author and she had for lunch, and the setting. The interviews are just the right length, each with a focus to maintain interest.

There is no judgment on Adele's part about the financial circumstances of her interview subjects, except once when Tabatha, an elderly African-American woman, asks Adele for money. While resentful at first, Adele came to accept her role as Tabatha's monthly donor. Her view of Tabatha, she realized, was not being diminished because of Tabatha's request for help. That early phone call was a "call to community".

Among the many situations described in this book, you're bound to find a woman's story that reflects your own. I could identify with Rachel, who decided to take a risk and become a marriage therapist working with couples rather than one partner at a time. Her training took time and money, and her new therapy practice isn't generating money as yet. She would rather take risks than not take on something new and challenging.

Rachel and Adele took on a challenge together when they addressed Adele's church congregation on their mutual work for Middle East peace. Rachel is Jewish, and Adele is Arab-American. "Whether in the wallet or at the pulpit," Adele writes, "whatever is worth having is worth taking risks for. And our holiness lies in the stretch."

The author was raised by immigrant parents who worked very hard to earn and save money. A couple of years in a Catholic private school led her to Catholicism and to taking her vows as a nun. She spent 16 years in a convent, where she was looked after very well. But she wasn't to have her own money. Once out in the world, Adele faced the beliefs about money with which she had been raised. She became "a hyperproductive money-

maker”, leaving no space for piety. A church-employed therapist helped Adele to slow down by encouraging her to smell something lovely, like fresh flowers. He told her, “Money is made for pleasure.”

When Adele became one of the beneficiaries of her parents’ estate following their deaths, she felt guilty for having so much money. As a poor woman, she hated money. As a rich one, she was still confused. A supportive stockbroker introduced her to a peacemaking group that would change her life. The Foundation for Mideast Peace sought to reconcile Arabs and Jews. Once she plunged into the work, she “got straight on what money I wanted to give to good causes”.

She took comfort in Marianne Williamson’s words in *A Woman’s Worth*: “It is God’s will that each of us, every woman, man and child, be happy, whole and successful.” Adele came to accept what a priest friend had written about her inheritance: “Whether you take a vow of poverty or take ownership of a Cadillac, it’s all about accepting the gifts God puts before you. All is gift.”

I never had heard money described as sacrament before, except for watching a former therapist place my check on her altar. I have been struggling ever since to see money in that light. Adele’s book is helping me. It is so refreshing to have a book linking money with spirituality.

Adele writes of her marital struggles when she shared her money with her new husband, Jim, who had been homeless. Yet he was better able to spend money than she was. He later received his own large check from a retirement account he had set up while teaching.

The appendix includes “Money Aerobics - Seven Stretches for Your Money Muscles”. “Avoid Running” is a big one for many of us who have overspent instead of facing “emotional woes”. The book ends with “Further Conversations”--questions to ask yourself about your relationship with money. Answering those questions could fill your own book.

Adele lives with her husband in Maitland, Florida where she spends time square dancing, conducting workshops on prejudice reduction or conflict resolution, signing books and smelling the orange blossoms on her property. To read more about Adele, see her website, here: www.MoneyAsSacrament.com.